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ABSTRACT

A 3-year, off-campus Master's degree program in human development has been implemented since 1978 in various counties in Maryland by the Department of Human Development of the University of Maryland (College Park). The main ingredient of the program is on-site, direct observation of teacher/student behavior followed up by small group sessions under trained participant/leaders and total group seminars under a trained faculty team. Each participant maintains an anecdotal record based on student behaviors. These records are then analyzed, summarized, interpreted, and shared. Based on findings, the participants begin building a repertoire of strategies, skills, and techniques; recognize patterns of academic behavior; form hypotheses; and ask and answer questions. During the first and second years of the program, participants receive three credit hours for each of the following courses: (1) Introduction to Human Development and Child Study; (2) Biological Bases of Behavior; (3) Social Bases of Behavior; (4) Integrative Behavior; (5) Learning Theory and the Educational Process; and (6) Quantitative Research Methods. The third year of the program involves independent study in specific courses, as well as large and small group meetings. The service value of delivering such alternative programs in remote areas is stressed, as well as success in transferring the model to other settings. (LL)

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Off Campus Master's Degree Program: A Unique Model

Institute for Child Study/Department of Human Development

by

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This paper presents an alternative delivery system that has been successfully implemented by the Department of Human Development of the University of Maryland. The system has been in operation since 1978. The first program was started in Garrett County, a community in the Appalachian Mountains of Western Maryland, 180 miles from College Park. Subsequent programs were developed in St. Mary's County in Southern Maryland, Baltimore City, Eastern Shore of Maryland, and in the country of Bermuda. Each program has followed a similar model with slight variations added to fit the local situation.

In the development of the program, several criteria were considered which are as follows: (1) a need for a program existed in the area, (2) there would be no sacrifice in the quality of the program delivered, (3) faculty time and resources would not be unduly strained, (4) the program was financially self-sufficient, and (5) admission standards would be the same as on-campus programs.

In September of 1978, 23 Garrett Country students were enrolled in the first program, and in May of 1981, twenty-two received their Master's degree. A second cohort was started in September of 1981 and all students graduated in May of 1984. A third cohort was started in Garrett County in 1988 with 21 students, and 20 are expected to graduate this coming Spring. Similar results were obtained in other settings. The program offered in Bermuda collapsed the course work into 2 1/2 years with all but one student graduating, however, some of these students required the extra half year to finish all their papers.

The particularly unique aspects of the delivery system include (1) the combination of small group sessions under the direction of trained participant/leaders and total group seminars under the leadership of a team of University of Maryland faculty, (2) block scheduling, and (3) the use of directly-observed behavior as the medium and basis for the discussion of a large portion of the program content.

Scheduling

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During the first two years of the program, all students enroll for the same nine credit hour block that runs from September through May. Once a month the total group meets with a team of University faculty on a Friday evening and all day Saturday. In addition, all students are required to meet approximately every week in small groups of 7 to 10 for 2 1/2 hours on a later afternoon or evening under the direction of a participant/leader. Participant/leaders receive training and guidance from the faculty team during a special session each month.

In the third year, students choose from among several offerings based on individual interests and needs. By scheduling the monthly weekend meetings/seminars a year in advance, participants are able to keep those weekends free from any competing activities.

Cooperative Planning and Teaching

One regular faculty member serves as the coordinator of the program for the total three-year cycle. Each of the three years a team of two additional faculty members works with the coordinator. The other two members of the team change each year so that the participants benefit from learning from at least seven different full time faculty members.

Each year's faculty team is responsible for the program content for that year. While students register for three distinct courses, the content of the courses is organized and synthesized into one overall experience by the faculty team. While each member of the team takes primary responsibility for certain portions of the content, all three members of the team are present and participate in all of the total group seminars on Friday evenings and Saturdays.

Each small group holds one of its weekly meetings on the Thursday evening prior to the Friday and Saturday total group seminars. One member of the faculty team meets with each of the small groups on that Thursday evening meeting to give guidance and consultation to the small group process.

Direct Observation of Behavior

One of the unique advantages of offering a program on-site is that it provides the laboratory for direct observation of student and teacher behaviors. To take maximal advantage of this opportunity, the direct observation and recording of behavior is

an integral and important aspect of the entire program. Participants are trained to observe and record behaviors objectively and to withhold immediate judgment about causes of behavior.

Participants' anecdotal records of directly observed behavior form the basis of an important portion of the program content. In the first year, the direct observation focuses on the forces which influence the behavior and development of children and youth. In the second year the direct observation focuses on factors which affect students' academic behavior and achievement. The direct observation in the third year focuses more on teaching behaviors.

Planned Interventions

During the second year of the program each participant (with support and guidance from the group and the faculty) plans, implements, and assesses the effect of an intervention intended to affect the academic behavior and/or achievement of an individual, a group, or an entire class.

More specifics about planned interventions and how they integrate with the total program are presented in the section of this paper that describes the second year content.

Small Group Activity

The small groups of 7 to 10 meet weekly under the direction of participant-leaders. The participant-leaders receive training and direction during special sessions with the faculty team. Small group activities are carefully planned and guided and are of three basic types: (1) specifically assigned activities that follow up or prepare for content that is presented and discussed by the regular faculty during the total group weekend seminars, (2) discussion of published research and theoretical literature related to the content of the seminars, and (3) processing of the anecdotal records based on directly observed behaviors. The processing of the information in the records follows clearly outlined procedures.

First Year Program Content

The first year of the program focuses on understanding forces which affect the behavior and development of children and youth. The forces considered are organized according to a six-area framework: Physical, affectional, socialization, peer, self-developmental, and self-adjustive.

Lectures, discussions, readings, papers, and projects done by the students are primarily in the following areas: (1) biological bases of behavior, (2) social bases of behavior, (3) peer group processes, and (4) affectional relationships and processes.

Each participant keeps an anecdotal record (case study) consisting primarily of directly observed behavior of a child or youth selected by the participant. In selecting youngsters for the case study, care is taken to be sure that those selected represent a wide variety. The children chosen by members of each small group should include boys and girls, a wide range of academic success/failure, and children seen as model children and those seen as having behavior problems.

As the case records develop, they are processed during a portion of the weekly small group meetings. The group processing includes the following steps:

Developing a Code of Ethics. The group works at developing a code of ethics which builds a trusting relationship among the members and protects the privacy of the children being observed. Included in the code of ethics developed must be provision for careful security of the case records, no discussion of content of records outside the group, and use of pseudo-names and places in the record.

Improving Objectivity. Group members read anecdotes aloud and help each other to improve the quality of the records (with particular emphasis on objectivity) as they begin to get to "know" the case studies of each of the other members of the group.

Classifying Data. The case records are combed for facts about the youngsters and the youngsters' environments. The facts are classified according to the six-area framework.

Finding Repeated Behaviors. Through a careful group process repeated patterns of behavior are identified.

Multiple Hypotheses. One of the repeated behaviors for each case study is chosen and the group hypothesizes about possible causes for that behavior. Several hypotheses related to each of the six areas are included. Commonly there are 20 or more hypotheses about the causes of a behavior. Each of the hypotheses is then tested against the facts in the record.

Record Summary. The record is summarized and implications drawn by writing answers to the following questions:

1. Given the way this youngster is expending his energy as shown by the record, what is life's curriculum for him/her? (What are the developmental tasks on which he/she is working?)

2. What are the things in this youngster's person and world (facts from the record classified according to the 6-area framework) that are assets to him/her and that facilitate the accomplishment of life's curriculum (developmental tasks)?

3. What are the things in this youngster's person and world that are liabilities for him/her as he/she goes about the business of working through life's curriculum (developmental tasks)?

4. What is the school presently doing to help/hinder the youngster in the accomplishment of his/her developmental tasks?

5 What could the school do to help this youngster more effectively accomplish his/her developmental tasks? (a) given practical realities, and (b) ideally.

During this first year, participants register and receive credit for the following 3 semester credit hour courses: (1) Introduction to Human Development and Child Study, (2) Biological Bases of Behavior, and (3) Social Bases of Behavior.

Second Year Program Content

The second year of the program focuses on (1) the identification and understanding of factors which most significantly affect academic behavior and achievement, and (2) the development of a repertoire of techniques/skills/strategies for positively influencing academic performance.

Lectures, discussions, readings, papers, and projects are primarily in the following areas: self processes in human development, learning theory, models of teaching, educational and psychological measurement, research methods, and basic applied statistics.

Each participant again keeps an anecdotal record consisting primarily of typical and revealing behavior of one child or youth observed in an academic situation. As during the first year, these records are processed during a portion of the weekly small group

meetings. The processing includes the following procedures:

Developing a Code of Ethics. The code relates to observing and recording behaviors and to sharing, discussing, and analyzing records and provides the foundation for building positive and mutually supporting, non-threatening relationships among the group members.

Sharing Records. Members of the group read their anecdotes in the small group meetings. In this way group members become familiar with all the students being studied and participants help each other to build quality records.

Identifying Data Relevant to Each of the Five Factors. As records are read, data relevant to each of the following five influencing factors are identified:

1. School curriculum. In directly observing and recording behaviors and settings, the following questions are kept in mind: Specifically, what academic instruction, opportunities, and experiences is the school providing for the child or youth being observed? How, specifically, does the student respond to those experiences? How does the student perceive those experiences? How does the student feel about those experiences?

2. Self-esteem. A student's feelings of and beliefs about self-worth, acceptability, belongingness, and security are believed to greatly affect his/her approach to tasks in general and to academic tasks in particular. A "secure" student is likely to apply his/her energies to challenging tasks. A student who doubts his/her self-worth may expend huge amounts of energy attempting to convince himself and the world of his worth. In observing behaviors and settings, questions such as the following are kept in mind: Are there any behaviors which suggest something about the level of self-esteem/security/belongingness felt by the student? What in the student's world is influencing his/her level of self-esteem? How do academic experiences affect the student's level of self-esteem? How do teacher/student interactions affect the student's level of self-esteem?

3. Self-confidence. From a perceptual psychological or phenomenological point of view, the most important factor affecting one's behavior is what one has learned about

himself/herself. From this point of view, the difference between academic successes and failures is likely to be associated with differences in what students have learned about themselves with respect to their competence in general and their ability to do academic tasks in particular. In observing and recording behaviors and settings, questions such as the following are kept in mind: What in the student's world (particularly school related experiences) is influencing his/her self-confidence in general and his/her confidence in academic tasks in particular? How confident is the student of his/her abilities in general? How confident is the student of specific academic abilities?

4. Physiological factors. In observing and recording behaviors and settings, questions such as the following are kept in mind: What is the general energy level of the student? What is his/her condition of health and nutrition? Are expectations the school curriculum imposes on the child compatible with the nature of the human organism in general and with the physical realities of the student being observed in particular?

5. Life's curriculum. The tasks on which an individual is expending his/her energy may be viewed as life's curriculum for that individual. In observing and recording behaviors and settings, questions such as the following are kept in mind: What is life's curriculum for this student? Is academic achievement one of the important tasks on which he/she is expending energy? Is the school's curriculum helping the student accomplish his/her life's curriculum?

Building a Repertory of Strategies. From among a wide range of sources, participants identify techniques, skills and strategies that are aimed at positively affecting students in each of the five influencing factors. These strategies are shared and discussed and a "master list" of identified strategies is developed by each small group.

Finding Patterns of Academic Behavior. Participants follow a specific strategy for identifying patterns of academic behavior.

Multiple Hypothesizing. Each participant chooses a significant pattern of academic behavior in the student he/she is studying. The group makes numerous hypotheses about factors which

may be involved causing that pattern of behavior.

Interventions. This procedure, which is also referred to as the action research project, is in many ways the core of the second year program and receives a great deal of emphasis.

Each participant decides on and plans an intervention(s) that he/she hypothesizes will have a positive effect on some aspect of the academic performance of either the student being studied, a group of students in a class, or a whole class, and assesses the effects of the intervention. The planning, conducting, and assessing of the interventions of each participant is done with the guidance and support of the small group and the University faculty team.

Each participant chooses an academic behavior that he/she wishes to change. This might be aimed at making a positive behavior even stronger or improving what is seen as inadequate performance. One or more intervention strategies are chosen. The type of intervention selected grows out of the multiple hypothesis procedure in which probable causes for the existing behavior were identified. The strategy (ies) selected is (are) usually from among the repertory of strategies that the group developed. The choice of specific strategies chosen also grows out of what participants have gained from the learning theory content of the second year. The assessment of the effects of the intervention is done in a very systematic way. The content of the measurement and quantitative research methods segments of the second year program provide the participants with the background and skills to do the assessment.

Prior to doing the intervention, each participant writes a formal action research proposal which is discussed at special proposal meetings with the small group and University faculty. After the proposal is approved the intervention is carried out and the effectiveness is assessed. Each participant then writes a "seminar paper" in which he/she formally reports the whole action research procedure, its outcomes, and conclusions.

Summary of the Record. Participants summarize and integrate the record around a set of "summary" questions.

During the second year participants register and receive credit for the following 3 semester credit hour courses (1) Integrative Bases of Behavior, (2) Learning Theory and the Educative Process, and (3) Quantitative Research Methods.

Third Year Program Content

In contrast of the first two years, students register for independent course experiences rather than for a "block." This provides for some individualization of programs according to needs and interests.

The courses offered are "team taught" by the University faculty and use the combination of total group seminars and small group meetings, but participants register for specific courses which meet at distinct times.